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SUBJECT: KARZAI URGES CODEL PELOSI TO SUPPORT AFGHAN ARMY,
POLICE, IRRIGATION AND POWER PROJECTS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Accompanied by the Ambassador, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and seven other House Democrats breakfasted with President Karzai at the Presidential Palace on 2/21. Karzai claimed Afghanistan was progressing much better than portrayed in the Western media and expressed optimism for additional progress stemming from the strategic review process. Karzai argued troops alone do not bring security and urged US support for irrigation and power projects. Karzai expressed support for the August 20 election date announced by the Afghan election commission. Finally, Karzai conveyed the deep gratitude of the Afghan people for continued US assistance to their country.

Introduction

12. (U) Codel Pelosi, comprised of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and Representatives Larson, DeLauro, Miller, Markey, Eshoo, Pascarella, and Capuano et with President Karzai over breakfast at the Palace. The Afghan attendees included UpperHouse Speaker Sebghatullah Mojaddedi, Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni, Foreign Minister Rain Spanta, National Security Advisor Zalmay Rsohl, and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Mhammad Anwar Jekdalek. Speaker Pelosi started the conversation by emphasizing the importance of the upcoming strategic review and asking President Karzai to give the Codel his view of the current "lay of the land" and detail his plan going forward.

Karzai's Positive Vision of Afghanistan

13. (U) Responding to several of the representatives' questions, President Karzai emphasized positive developments in security and governance. Karzai claimed the Afghan police were working efficiently in large cities such as Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. Karzai admitted there were still problems in other areas, but said these stemmed from the international community starting its police training programs in earnest too late. The number of police is still small compared to the population and there are still many administrative hurdles such as slow pay and lack of training. Karzai urged the international community to continue and expand police training efforts.

14. (SBU) Speaker Pelosi asked President Karzai specifically about the security situation in Kabul. Karzai said that except for isolated incidents, security is good in Kabul. Outside of Kabul too, security is not as bad as portrayed in western media. Karzai described formerly desolate highways as jammed with traffic. Border provinces with Pakistan such as Kunar and Nangarhar are much more secure than Pakistan border areas, even Peshawar, Karzai claimed. Karzai agreed with Representative Markey's quotation from a National Directorate of Intelligence report, stating "no progress" is possible in Afghanistan without controlling the border with Pakistan.

15. (U) Karzai contrasted Afghanistan's government and civil society now with the situation five years ago, emphasizing such positive developments as the collegiality in Parliament among former enemies, new universities, new media outlets, and economic growth, as particularly important achievements. He also said the government bureaucracy works much better. For example, he now receives regular, thorough security briefings, rather than ad hoc incident reports.

Additional US Troops and the Strategic Review Process

16. (C) Speaker Pelosi characterized Obama's decision to announce the deployment of additional troops to Afghanistan before the completion of the strategic review as "courageous" and "a risk." The deployment of these troops is not popular in parts of the US particularly because of the difficult economic environment, she said. Representative Larson told Karzai many members of Congress were also skeptical of President Obama's decision. He asked Karzai to present benchmarks by which progress could be more easily evaluated. Karzai did not immediately provide these benchmarks, but said he was very pleased President Obama accepted the Afghan government's offer to participate in the strategic review process.

17. (U) Karzai asked for more international support for the Afghan Army and the Afghan Police. Afghans must feel that their government is providing security, Karzai emphasized, rather than international forces. Also, Karzai asked for more support for irrigation and power projects, claiming that

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if the international community delivered this support, Afghanistan could "feed itself" in two years.

Making the US Safer

18. (C) Responding to the Speaker's question on how to protect the US from terrorists, Karzai urged the US to address terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan. Karzai said Al Qaeda are not present in Afghanistan, although from Pakistan they may direct terrorist operations here. Karzai described the Pakistani government's recent decision to allow implementation of Sharia law in Swat an "alarming" and "shocking" mistake which would make the security situation in Pakistan worse. He plans to meet with Pakistan President Zardari as soon as possible to discuss the situation in Swat; a scheduled meeting last week was delayed due to a weather-related flight cancellation.

Taliban: 7800 Reconciled to the New Afghanistan

19. (C) Karzai claimed 7800 Taliban had reconciled with the Afghan government as a direct result of government-led talks emphasizing the compatibility between the Afghan constitution and Islam. Many Taliban were "country bumpkins" who could easily be convinced to accept the Afghan government. In describing the program, Karzai said the government would only deal with Afghan Taliban who were not Al Qaeda and who would accept the Afghan constitution without ideological hang-ups, for example, they would accept women's equality.

Support for the August 20 Election Date

110. (C) President Karzai expressed support for the 8/20 election date and underlined security conditions would not allow elections to take place by the 5/22 date contemplated in the Afghan constitution. Responding to Pelosi's request to expand on what he meant by "security conditQs," Karzai explained security (fighting and violence in thQouth),Qechnical, and weather conditions preclude holding a fair and free election in May. Karzai claimed that if the elections were held on or before May 22, he would be the winner as other candidates, "have not yet booked their tickets to the game," meaning that the August date would allow for more robust competition between presidential candidates. Parliament objects to holding the election on August 20 as a violation of the constitution, Karzai noted.

Concerned about Civilian Casualties; Appreciative of US Assistance

111. (SBU) Karzai "felt he had to raise his voice" in responding to civilian casualties incidents. However, Afghan people are still immensely grateful to the United States. Without US intervention and continued support, we would not be sitting here talking, Karzai said. Karzai said the Afghan government was looking forward to sitting together with US officials during the strategic review and discussing differences and devising a mutually agreeable plan to make both Afghanistan and the US safer.

112. (U) The Codel did not have an opportunity to clear on this message.

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